

Multi-Governance in Higher Education: The Case of Chile 2018-2023

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Abstract

This article examines the different roles the State/government plays in coordinating the Chilean higher education system. It proposes a conceptual and analytical framework based on a multi-governance approach, which considers multi-level, multi-actor and multi-agenda dimensions. This framework is used to study the different roles played by the State in higher education governance in Chile, especially after the 2018 legislative reforms. The results show an increase in the State's influence on system coordination and that the State/government has strengthened its role as regulator, evaluator and funder of higher education. Similarly, from a multi-level dimension perspective, the results show that the governance of higher education in Chile is highly centralised. At the same time, despite centralising decision-making, the Chilean higher education system is seen as highly complex from a multistakeholder and multi-agency perspective. Lastly, we suggest using this conceptual approach to provide valuable insights for the study of the complexity of governance in higher education systems in other Latin American contexts.

Keywords

Higher education, multi-governance, policy, Chile

1. Introduction

Changes in the governance of national higher education systems have sparked increased interest within the academic community in characterizing and explaining these transformations (Capano, Regini & Turri, 2017; Donina & Paleari, 2019; Mok, 2022). There is a broad consensus in the literature that reforms initiated since the 1980s have led to a diminished role of the State and an increased role of markets and institutions themselves in the governance of higher education (HE) (Fumasoli, 2015). However, recent studies indicate that different national systems are experiencing changes in different directions (Dobbins & Knill, 2017).

Although Clark's coordination triangle (1983) has commonly been used as a model to investigate changing governance dynamics across different regions (Hsieh, 2022), debate has intensified around the search for new conceptual frameworks that encompass the growing complexity of the dynamics of coordination in diverse local contexts (Frølich & Caspersen, 2015; Lepori & Jongbloed, 2018; Shattock, 2014). In Europe, for instance, tensions are acknowledged among the diverse forces coordinating HE in three dimensions: multilevel, multisectoral, and multiagent. On the other hand, the European Commission for Higher Education, as a supranational body with increasing competencies, has created tensions among various levels of higher education — and importantly — in governance (Vukasovic & Stensaker, 2018). Also noted are horizontal tensions amongst the areas of pedagogy, science, technology, and innovation (Chou & Gornitzka, 2014). Finally, the rise in non-state actors' participation across local, national, and supranational levels

has contributed to increased complexity in relationships revolving around coordination within higher education (Fumasoli, Stensaker & Vukasovic, 2018).

In this scenario of increasing complexity, new analytical approaches have emerged. One such approach is Schimank's model (2002), which expands Clark's triangle into five coordination mechanisms: state regulation, competition, academic self-governance, managerial administration, and external orientation. This model has been used to examine governance dynamics in higher education across various countries (de Boer, Enders & Schimank, 2008; Donina, Meoli & Paleari, 2015; Kováts et al., 2017; Hladchenko, Antonowicz & de Boer, 2017; Suprum & Furiv, 2018; Donina & Jaworska, 2022). Efforts have also been made to expand the number of ideal governance types (Jungblut & Dobbins, 2023) and to develop hybrid models encompassing the growing heterogeneity of forms of coordination in HE (Hsieh, 2022). Examples include network governance (Kabir, 2021), corporatized collaborative governance (Mok & Jiang, 2020), as well as hybrid schemes like “state-governed market” (Jarvis & Mok, 2019) and “societal-market governance” (Mok, 2005).

In Latin America (LA), the focus has been on policies rather than the organizational dimension of governance. Studies have highlighted the analysis from the political economy perspective of national higher education systems in LA (Brunner & Ganga, 2016a), the analysis of policies that generate stability in system configuration and governance schemes (Mella-Polanco, 2018), the development of a governance typology based on public policies in the sector in LA, and also the study of relationships between governance, public policies, and institutional performance (Acosta-Silva, Ganga-Contreras & Rama-Vitale, 2021). Fewer studies directly focus on coordination mechanisms, again often using Clark's triangle as a basis. Notable among these are studies examining governance changes in Chile, Argentina, and Mexico (González-Ledesma & Álvarez-Mendiola, 2019) and trends in governance changes in LA (Brunner & Ganga, 2016b). However, there is a growing interest in developing new HE governance taxonomies that account for the complexity of national systems, such as a study addressing mechanisms of interaction between universities and the regulating state, markets, and civil society to ensure HE quality (Soto-Montoya, 2021).

In Chile, recent studies have approached governance from the perspective of Clark's coordination triangle (1983), such as a study on the evolution of governance over the last 50 years (Brunner, 2015), a study describing the main characteristics of Chilean HE governance from the perspective of academic capitalism (Brunner, Ganga-Contreras & Rodriguez-Ponce, 2018), and more recently, a study examining the evolution of HE governance under the lens of the governance equalizer (Brunner & Alarcón, 2023). However, there are no studies in Chile or Latin America that address the complexity of HE coordination mechanisms from a multilevel, multisectoral, and multiagent perspective. To address this gap, this article has two fundamental objectives. The first is to propose a conceptual and analytical framework based on the multigovernance approach (Chou, Jungblut, Ravinet & Vukasovic, 2017) to facilitate the study of the diverse roles exercised by the State in HE governance in Latin America. The second is to examine the different roles played by the Chilean State in HE governance, particularly after the reforms introduced in 2018.

This article is organized into five sections. The following section reviews relevant literature and proposes the conceptual and analytical framework for studying governance in the region. Next, a

brief description of the institutional structure of Chile's higher education system is presented. Then, the methodology used, including information collection mechanisms and sources, is described, and the results of the analysis applied to the Chilean case are presented. Finally, the implications of the findings are discussed, and the main conclusions are outlined.

2. Conceptual and Analytical Framework

2.1. Multigovernance in Higher Education

The concept of multilevel governance (MLG) was developed to describe the increasing complexity and interdependence of this phenomenon within the European Union (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). According to this approach, policy actors, rather than the State, are the protagonists of decision-making processes, and their behavior is governed by institutional norms (Fumasoli, 2015). Initial conceptualizations distinguished two types (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). In the first type, there is a limited number of governance levels, and authority is defined in each of them (e.g., local, regional, national levels). The second type is based on task jurisdiction that can change depending on needs and where responsibilities can overlap. In this case, governance levels are unlimited and depend on the scope or sector of public policy (Chou et al., 2017).

Moreover, academic debate has caused the concept of multilevel governance to evolve, incorporating new approaches and dimensions of analysis. In this sense, Piattoni (2010) argues that state transformation can be studied through three dimensions. The first, called center-periphery, is where the State transfers authority to different sub-national levels in any of the scenarios formulated by Hooghe & Marks (2003). The second, the national-international dimension, accounts for the loss of influence of the nation-state in favor of supranational structures. The third dimension refers to the State-society link, visualizing the transfer of authority from the State to diverse social actors and interest groups (Fumasoli, 2015).

Furthermore, it has been observed that multilevel governance is increasingly being used to study the dynamics of the forces of coordination in complex systems, such as higher education governance. In Europe, the multilevel governance approach emphasizes actors' positions within organizations and how their positions affect their behavior (Fumasoli, 2015). At the same time, it emphasizes that these organizations interact at multiple levels based on their autonomy, resources, strategy, and environmental conditions. In the case of Latin America, the multilevel concept is frequently used to refer to the public and private subsystems (González-Ledesma & Álvarez-Mendiola, 2019) and to differentiate between university and non-university subsystems (Rama, 2018). Ultimately, while the European multilevel approach emphasizes the organization's location within a center-periphery continuum, the Latin American lens uses the multilevel concept to horizontally classify diverse types of higher education institutions.

Similarly, the contribution of Chou, Jungblut, Ravinet, and Vukasovic (2017) presents a critical perspective and an expansion of the multilevel governance concept to understand the complexity and dynamism of higher education. These authors argue that the multilevel vision, traditionally focused on the distribution of authority among different levels of government, is insufficient to explain the reality of policy coordination. Therefore, they introduce two new dimensions: "multiactor" and "multiagenda", which are independent of each other and of the multilevel

dimension (see Table 1). They focused on the variations of the multi-dimensions found in higher education policymaking and termed this approach “multi-s,” but focusing on Latin America and specifically Chile, multigovernance best captures and elucidates the evolving complexities.

Table 1: Dimensions of multigovernance

Dimensions	Description
Multilevel	Focuses on the background and consequences of the distribution or concentration of authority across different governance levels (European approach). Establishes a classification of higher education institutions based on their ownership and type of higher education (Latin American approach).
Multiactors	Recognizes both the heterogeneity of the "State" and its numerous constituent institutions as well as the involvement of non-state actors (e.g., stakeholder organizations, businesses, consumers) in a policy domain.
Multiagenda	Identifies how clashes and complementarities between policy issues and sectors enter and leave the public sphere.

Source: Based on Chou, Jungblut, Ravinet, and Vukasovic (2017); González-Ledesma and Álvarez-Mendiola (2019); Rama (2018).

The multiactor dimension involves the participation of various actors, including diverse ministries, public agencies, academic bureaucracies, students, families, and a variety of stakeholders and external interest groups (Brunner et al., 2021). Simultaneously, the multiagenda dimension refers to the diversity of issues that require decision-makers’ attention, each expressed in a specific policy arena, such as equity in access or research funding.

2.2. Roles of the State

Within this complexity, the role played by the State varies considerably depending on the objectives pursued, the focus of the public policies it promotes, and the diverse instruments it employs. Our analysis distinguishes five roles assumed by the State in Latin America in its interaction with other forces of coordination of national higher education systems, namely, university institutions and relevant markets (Alarcón and Brunner, 2023; Clark, 1983).

The following table distinguishes the five roles of the State based on policy orientations and the instruments used:

Table 2: Roles of the State, policy orientation and instruments

Roles of the State	Policy orientation	Instruments
System designer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization • Rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation • Statutes
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts • Incentives
Regulator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulations • Procedures
Evaluator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality • Effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria and quality standards

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance indicators
Funder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency • Productivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance contracts • Resource allocation based on outcomes

Source: Based on Alarcón and Brunner (2023); Capano and Pritoni (2018)

As a System Designer, the State assumes a pioneering role, designing, maintaining, or modifying the fundamental principles governing higher education. Through its legislative power, the State determines which entities can provide higher education and grant legitimate credentials, as well as the methods of financing higher education institutions (HEIs). This process establishes the ground rules and creates a systemic framework, known as metagovernance (Gjaltema et al., 2020). In Latin America, this basic framework revolves around university autonomy, understood as a balance between autonomy and public responsibility, and around the integration between state and non-state HEIs (Gonzalez-Ledesma & Álvarez-Mendiola, 2019).

Subsequently, the State plays an important role as Principal, relating to higher education institutions acting as agents within the framework of agency theory (Lane and Kivistö, 2008). In this model, the State defines the goals and expected outcomes using contracts. It also establishes control mechanisms and accountability. Indeed, the State redefines university autonomy to synchronize its own interests with those of institutions through national development strategies and plans. This redefinition applies to both state and non-state universities, leading to intense debates about the transformation of the public sector in Latin America (Ordorika & Soley, 2018). These changes have led to new forms of coordination and policy instruments, recognized by some authors in the region as regulated autonomy (Acosta, 2008).

As a Regulator, the State defines, enforces, and oversees compliance with regulations aimed at governing the operation of markets in higher education. In contrast to past tendencies in Latin America favoring market deregulation and acceleration, there is currently a noticeable increase in regulations via norms and procedures spanning most of the region (Rama, 2006; Moreno and Muñoz-Aguirre, 2020). This regulatory phase is multifaceted, covering multiple relevant markets and quasi-markets, from university to non-university education, in-person, distance, or hybrid modes, and local, national, and international scopes. Concerning the areas subject to regulation, Jongbloed (2003), followed by Teixeira et al., (2004), and subsequently Jungblut and Vukasovic, (2017), distinguish eight fundamental spheres or “freedoms” of markets. Four on the side of supplying institutions: their freedom to access the market, specify the product, allocate their resources, and set prices, and four established for the benefit of users: freedom to choose the provider and product, access information for that choice, and pay a price covering the cost of the service received.

Fourthly, the State assumes the role of Evaluator concerning the accreditation and accountability of universities. European literature recognizes this function as “control at a distance” (Chu and Westerheijden, 2019) or as an auditing State (Dobbins and Jungblut, 2020). This role is crucial as it establishes a set of rules, technological devices, and quality assurance practices, thereby building a new relationship between the State and HEIs (Marquina et al., 2022). These practices and devices, aiming to rationalize institutional productive functions and ensure process and outcome quality, have spread widely across Latin America. Typically, the State uses quality criteria,

standards, and performance indicators as primary instruments to assess the quality and effectiveness of HEIs.

Finally, the fifth role of the State is that of a Funder. Governments continuously adjust their policies to increase institutions' efficiency and effectiveness. European literature highlights that financing is part of the governance toolbox as a steering mechanism (Jongbloed, 2008). In Latin America, this role faces a complex landscape due to multiple cost-sharing schemes and intense differentiation of institutional types (Rama, 2018). Public financing is allocated to both institutions and students, using outcome-oriented contracts to promote reforms or enhance institutions' quality or equity based on national government priorities and sector policy objectives. Specifically, the use of global subsidies or block grants is common, with the amount determined through negotiation, historical basis, formulas (linked to inputs or outcomes), or performance contracts. Moreover, these mechanisms often combine, leading to various hybrid modalities (González Ledesma & Álvarez Mandiola, 2020; Hsieh, 2022).

3. The Chilean Higher Education System: An Overview

The higher education system in Chile is based on principles of autonomy, quality, equity, relevance, diversity, and inclusion established by law. Institutions have the freedom to define their curriculum and structure, aiming for quality and excellence in teaching, research, and academic outreach, including rigorous evaluation and accreditation. Equity emphasizes ensuring equal access to education and seeks to eliminate any form of discrimination. Relevance ensures that education responds to social needs and contributes to the country's development. Diversity and inclusion promote a plural and fair educational environment, respecting different educational approaches and projects, and eliminating discrimination to effectively integrate all students.

From the State perspective, the higher education system is coordinated by several key institutions. The Ministry of Education, through the Undersecretariat of Higher Education, is responsible for proposing strategies and policies for higher education development. The National Council for Education and the Council of Rectors (CRUCH)¹ advise and propose higher education public policies to the Ministry of Education. The National Accreditation Commission is responsible for accrediting higher education institutions and their study programs. This involves evaluating and certifying the quality of institutions and programs based on established criteria and standards. Finally, the Higher Education Superintendency is obliged to supervise and oversee higher education institutions, ensuring their compliance with current laws and regulations.

The National System for Ensuring the Quality of Higher Education (SINACES) serves as a coordinating body for public policies in the sector. Its main objective is to ensure the quality of higher education in the country. This system includes the Ministry of Education through the Undersecretariat of Higher Education, the National Council for Education, the National Accreditation Commission, and the Superintendency of Higher Education. These institutions are oriented towards achieving excellence, attaining the objectives declared by institutions in educational matters, knowledge generation, research, and innovation, and ensuring the quality of processes and results in performing their functions and complying with quality criteria and standards.

¹ In 2022, the CRUCH included 18 State universities, 9 private universities considered "traditional universities," and 3 private and recently incorporated universities (created after the 1980 reform).

Additionally, the higher education system consists of three main types of institutions: (i) universities offering undergraduate and graduate programs in various disciplines and engaged in research and knowledge creation. The university subsystem comprises 18 state universities, 28 private universities established after 1980, and 12 private universities belonging to CRUCH; (ii) professional institutes focusing on professional training for specific careers, granting professional and technical degrees but not academic degrees; and (iii) technical training centers providing short-cycle programs based on practical and applied skills, capable of granting technical degrees but not academic degrees. This technical-professional subsystem consists of 33 professional institutes (all private) and 47 technical training centers, of which 15 are state-owned and 32 private (MINEDUC, 2022).

4. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach utilizing the single-case method (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Yin, 2018). In the first phase, data was collected through review and analysis of secondary information sources, and this phase was developed in three stages. Subsequently and based on the information collected in the first phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with key figures in the field of higher education.

The review and analysis phase consisted of two data collection strategies. The first stage of data collection involved examining literature on higher education governance authored by researchers from the global North and Latin America over the last two decades, forming the foundation for the conceptual framework. In the second stage, recent legislative changes and the evolution of key public policies and government programs in Chilean higher education over the past ten years were investigated. This encompassed legislative acts, policy reports, academic literature, and gray literature. Specifically, it focused on normative modifications and the implications of the Higher Education Law (N°21.091), released on May 29, 2018, and the State Universities Law (N°21.094), published on June 5, 2018. Finally, in the third stage, an analysis of the various roles of the State as a coordinating entity in Chilean higher education was conducted, considering governance from a three-dimensional perspective, encompassing multilevel, multiactor, and multiagenda dimensions.

Following data collection and analysis, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted based on primary information collection. These interviews engaged a group of key figures, including rectors from diverse Chilean universities and senior researchers specializing in higher education. The objective was to gather insights into local actors' perceptions regarding the ramifications of the recent higher education reform through the lens of multigovernance. These interviews took place between 2020 and 2021.

To evaluate the Chilean higher education system within the framework of multigovernance, a guide was developed to analyze the three dimensions of multigovernance — multilevel, multiactor, and multiagenda — based on the five roles that the State assumes (System designer, Principal, Regulator, Evaluator, and Funder) as coordination mechanisms within the higher education system, particularly after the 2018 reform. Each author individually examined these dimensions

using the guide. In case of discrepancies, a final consensus was reached among the authors through an exchange of ideas and perspectives.

5. Results

To disentangle the complexities in the mechanisms of interactions between HEIs and the regulating state, markets, and civil society, results are analyzed from the multilevel, multiactor, and multiagenda dimensions.

5.1. Multilevel Dimension

In the center-periphery dimension of governance, the Chilean Higher Education System operates under a single governance level: national. In other words, there are no sub-national subsystems, and both policies and legal regulations that serve as the fundamental framework of the Higher Education system apply nationally. Indeed, the new law 21.091/2018 establishes the Undersecretariat of Higher Education to strengthen the State's role in centralized policy coordination. This notably facilitated the adoption of measures aimed at effectively addressing the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, viewed through the Latin American lens of the multilevel concept, the recent reform has both consolidated and expanded the diversity of institutions comprising the Chilean Higher Education system. The new legislation maintains the three levels of university, professional, and technical education. Simultaneously, it retains a mixed provision scheme, encompassing both public and private entities. Furthermore, the new regulatory framework establishes the state technical subsystem through the establishment of regional State technical training centers. While this innovation has heightened competition among institutions for student enrollment, State technical training centers, contrary to expectations, have only achieved low enrollment levels contrary to their promoters' expectations.

In its role as Principal, the national State possesses a set of instruments used to align governmental priorities with the objectives and actions developed by Higher Education institutions. These instruments rely on managerial mechanisms such as objective planning, contracts, performance indicators, goals, oversight bodies, and accountability mechanisms operating within a framework of negotiation between central-national public bodies and Higher Education institutions (Fernández, 2015). Each public body manages one or more instruments and engages with Higher Education institutions through programs and projects via open competitions and/or direct approaches. Similar relationships exist at the regional level, albeit through simpler and more constrained schemes. In this sense, relationships of agency occur between multiple Principals (various state/governmental agencies) and multiple agents (the different HEIs). Indeed, this represents the most complex type of principal-agent relationship given the multiplicity of connections (Lane, 2008). The intensification of the contractual relationship over the last decade has significantly increased the influence of public policies on the priorities and objectives of Higher Education institutions. Simultaneously, the multiple Principals have reinforced the multi-purpose nature of HEIs, evident in the definitions outlined in the strategic plans established by the HEIs themselves in recent years (Huerta-Riveros, Gaete-Feres, & Pedraja-Rejas, 2020; Sessarego Espeleta & González Campos, 2020). The following quote reflects the perceived loss of institutions' ability to define their goals and the strong external influence:

“What defines a real strategic plan is what the university wants to achieve, isn't it? The academic unit wants to achieve something. But it comes with pre-defined indicators and standards, and that's the logic of this system”.

Furthermore, the legislation introduced in 2018 marked a significant change in state regulation, breaking away from the gradual trend observed from 1990 to 2018 (Brunner, 2015). In this regard, the new regulatory framework has two relevant effects on governance from a multilevel perspective. On one hand, it introduces a set of norms, institutions, and powers that strengthen the regulatory capacity of the bureaucratic center over Higher Education institutions. Particularly, the creation of the Higher Education Superintendency with extensive powers to oversee compliance with legal norms and ensure proper use of public resources by HEIs. Similarly, it establishes rules and prohibitions for HEIs organized as private non-profit entities. These rules include prohibiting for-profit entities from controlling HEIs, using resources exclusively for institutional purposes, regulating operations with related parties, requiring a superior administrative unit responsible for HEIs' assets and financial matters, and imposing duties on members of the higher administration body of HEIs. Additionally, the administration of the single admission system was transferred from universities to the Undersecretary of Higher Education, although HEIs retain participation in technical aspects. On the other hand, the introduction of a new student financing scheme based on gratuity and the definition of eligibility criteria for institutions have broadened the diversity of subsystems within the Higher Education system. Now, in addition to existing classification variables such as ownership (public/private) and type of education (university or technical-professional), the variable of affiliation to gratuity (with gratuity/without gratuity) has been added. In this regard, the recent reform has increased the complexity of the Higher Education system from a multilevel perspective.

In its role as Evaluator, the recent Higher Education Law 21,094 of 2018 strengthens the public institutional framework responsible for quality assurance and raises the standards required of HEIs. Indeed, the regulation maintains the authority of the State/Government concentrated at the national level and strengthens its institutional framework through the creation of the National Quality Assurance System (SINACES). Simultaneously, it consolidates the external quality assurance system through the definition of quality criteria and standards for each university and technical-professional subsystem. This external evaluation system has become a powerful tool for state control under the new “steering at a distance” parameters and the notion of regulated autonomy (Chu & Westerheijden, 2019). This has led to the establishment of a new “soft” control regime over the various HEI subsystems, assuming the substantive autonomy of HEIs and a more limited and continuously negotiated procedural autonomy. Specifically, this new evaluative bureaucratic center, SINACES, aims to rationalize and increase the production functions of HEIs, enhance individual and institutional productivity, elevate their effectiveness and relevance, ensure the quality of processes and outcomes, and measure, through appropriate metrics and indicators, the alignment of results with government policy objectives.

In its role as Funder, the State assumes a more prominent role in financing the Higher Education system, particularly through student financing via gratuity (Brunner et al., 2021). In this sense, the new regulations establish a gratuity system for 60% of the population with lower incomes. Presently, approximately 40% of students in the Higher Education system benefit from gratuity, which in Chile operates as a voucher system (MINEDUC, 2022). In general terms, the new

regulations have led to a decrease in private expenditure on Higher Education, which has been replaced by public spending. Similarly, through student financing, the State has favored HEIs belonging to university and technical-professional subsystems affiliated with gratuity. However, since this is a portable gratuity, HEIs must compete for the enrollment of students benefiting from the subsidy within a quasi-market based on public funds. On the other hand, despite the strengthening of regional governments that create an incipient space for public financing at the local level, the national level predominates as the center of authority in terms of allocating public financing, as evidenced by the 10% of resources transferred from the State to HEIs via institutional financing allocated by regional governments in 2022 (CGR, 2022).

5.2. Multiactor Dimension

Historically, Chile has had a mixed public-private system for Higher Education (Brunner, 2015). In the latter half of the last century, the country had a university system composed of eight institutions, two public and six private. Following the coup d'état in 1973 and the neoliberal reform introduced by a Military Government in the 1980s, there was a horizontal and vertical diversification of the system through the creation of new private institutions: universities, professional institutes, and technical training centers (Fernández, 2008). After the return to democracy, the system maintained a strongly private character from the perspective of its political economy, albeit with the gradual introduction of public regulations (Brunner, 2009).

Between 1990 and 2014, public policies in the sector were primarily aimed at favoring access to and improving the quality of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within a framework of competition in relevant markets, such as student enrollment and public financing. In this context, changes in the rules of the game and public policies in the sector sparked lively debates among the various actors involved in a diverse system from the point of view of the multiple existing institutional projects and the multiple stakeholders engaged. Michelle Bachelet's 2014 government plan was based on the commitment to strengthen public institutionalization and the provision of state Higher Education. That commitment at least partially stemmed from the demands of the student movement that emerged in 2011, which pushed for changes to Chile's educational system. Indeed, the changes introduced in the 2018 law followed yet another series of intense mobilizations and discussions in various political and social forums regarding the State's role in Higher Education (HE) and particularly in its funding, with active participation from students, families, diverse groups and consortia of HEIs (state, private, regional, traditional, university, and technical-professional), research centers, Parliament, and political parties, among other organizations. In effect, however, the 2018 reform also expanded the number of actors within the HE system. On the State's side, new bodies were created to establish sector policies (Higher Education Undersecretariat), oversee compliance with the law and use of resources (the Higher Education Superintendency), and ensure HEI quality (SINACES). On the higher education institutional side, state technical training centers were established, adding to the two state universities created in 2015. With the expanded number of actors, diverse relationships between different government agencies and various HEIs have developed into a scheme of connections between multiple principals and multiple agents. In the case of Principals, there is a marked predominance of the central-national levels with emerging — but still limited — regional-level involvement. Without doubt, however, multiactors from multilevels have made governance of HEs increasingly complex

from the perspective of the stakeholders involved, their interests, interactions, tensions, and conflicts.

The State mainly exercises its role as Regulator through the Ministry of Education, via the Higher Education Undersecretariat and the Higher Education Superintendency (MINEDUC, 2018). These bodies regulate the operation of the university and technical-professional subsystems. In both subsystems, state and non-state institutions coexist with diverse educational projects. In this context, like-minded HEIs organize themselves around associations or consortia that act as counterparts to the State. In the university subsystem, comprising 58 institutions (MINEDUC, 2022), there are five groupings: the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (CRUCH), the Consortium of State Universities, the Network of Non-State Public Universities, the Association of Regional Universities, and the Corporation of Private Universities.

The new 2018 law has also introduced regulations that restrict some of the four freedoms (freedom to access the market, specify the product, allocate institutional resources, and set prices) enjoyed by HE providers (Jungblut and Vukasovic, 2017). This is evidenced in the case of universities through certain restrictions: the eligibility requirements for access to free education funding include certain limitations, funds provided by free education have certain usage restrictions, growth in new student enrollments is subject to state control, and tuition fees are regulated by an expert panel (i.e., price fixing). Yet, within the context of Latin America, Chile maintains a mixed-provision HE scheme where the regulatory framework integrates state and non-state sectors. This scheme has brought its own challenges especially for the role of Funder as will be detailed below. In its role as Evaluator, the State represented by the National Accreditation Commission (CNA) is responsible for a process involving a broad set of actors at different levels (national, regional, and local). According to Law 21.091/2018, the process begins with self-assessment, either institutional or at the program level, involving internal community participation (authorities, academics, administrative staff, and students) and various external stakeholders from the geographical areas where the HEIs are located (governmental agencies, social, cultural, and business organizations). Self-assessment is complemented by an external evaluation process conducted initially by a committee of evaluators appointed by the CNA. In this process, evaluators can engage with various internal and external stakeholders and establish evaluative judgments regarding HEIs' compliance with quality criteria and standards. Subsequently, in the case of institutional accreditation, these evaluative judgments are presented to the CNA for consideration by the Commission members and their resolution in terms of the accreditation outcome (basic level 3 years; advanced 4-5 years; and excellence 6-7 years). This is a participatory and deliberative process aiming to reconcile the diverse sensitivities and interests of the actors regarding the perception of HEI quality, where the State through the CNA has the final say regarding the evaluative outcome, although institutions can appeal CNA decisions to the National Education Council and through the courts of justice. In essence, the 2018 reform consolidates the State's Evaluator role, remotely establishing requirements, guiding criteria, standards, rewards, and penalties for institutions, aligning them with national priorities and the general interest.

In its role as Funder, one of the main tensions between the State/Government and HEIs has stemmed from the differential treatment based on ownership type and year of establishment. Although Gonzalez-Ledesma & Álvarez-Mendiola (2019) consider Chile, in comparison with the rest of Latin America, as a country with an integrated HE system from the perspective of the

transversality of its rules and public policies, there are some instruments that operate differentially, particularly those related to access to public financing. In recent years, debates have intensified regarding the implications of the public – state and non-state – character of HE, questioning whether the term “public” should exclusively apply to state HEIs, though in fact, Law 21.094/2018 establishes specific amounts of public funds to strengthen state universities. This direct allocation method via law differs from the trend of changing public financing criteria based on the contribution of HEIs (both state and private) to generating public goods in HE.

The changes introduced by the 2018 HE law also strengthened the State's funding role and simultaneously produced modifications in the actors' participation in HE financing. The most significant changes stem from the financing of free education. In the Chilean system, there has been a transition from a cost-sharing scheme with a predominant private component to a co-financing model with increasing state participation. Through this new law, families and students from the 60% lowest income bracket no longer directly or indirectly pay for HE (through student loans). Similarly, as a significant number of private HEIs have gradually joined the free education scheme, there has been a shift from a dominant market scheme to a political economy model with higher state financing. In theory, increased government involvement in funding higher education is beneficial. In practice, the dilemma of public funding is to find the right balance between cost, access and quality. Current evidence suggests that despite the implementation of free tuition policies, the increase in access to higher education for the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups has been marginal (Clasing, 2023). Moreover, the policy of regulated fees has tended to underestimate the real costs of undergraduate programmes, resulting in lower revenues for universities. This approach runs the risk of making educational quality the variable to be adjusted in the face of financial pressures. However, if resources are allocated in a fiscally efficient and sustainable manner, improving access and minimising negative consequences, the experience of free tuition in Chile could stand out as a notable exception to the arguments in favour of cost-sharing higher education systems (Delisle and Bernasconi, 2018). One of the interviewees illustrates the perceived disadvantage of free institutions due to price and tuition fee regulation:

“So, the position of those universities that are in a disadvantaged position in relation to those universities that are not in a free university, I think that's really objective and nobody can doubt that.”

Indeed, students meeting academic requirements can access eligible private HEIs for free. Free education accounted for 48% of the total public funding to HE in 2022. Scholarships, loans, and other student benefits reached 25%, while funding to HEIs (via direct allocation, competitive funds, agreements, and other mechanisms) represented 27% (CGR, 2022). Additionally, state HEIs received 31% of the total public funding to HE, while non-state HEIs received the remaining 69%. However, public funding allocated to state HEIs represented US\$ 9,715 (PPP) per student in 2019 and US \$2,891 (PPP) per student in the case of private HEIs (OECD, 2022).

5.3. Multiagenda Dimension

In its role as a Systemic Designer, various issues vie for the State's and decision-makers' attention across different instances within the HE system's operation. Normative adjustments and public policy priorities in the sector result from complex negotiations among diverse stakeholders

concerning multiple topics seeking a place on the public agenda. In this sense, the 2018 HE law moves towards strengthening public regulation and increasing state funding. In terms of regulation, issues related to the control and evaluation of HEIs are facilitated through new institutions, public structures, and new instruments, as previously mentioned.

At the same time, Law No. 21.094 of 2018 introduces changes for State universities in terms of institutional governance and financing. The new regulation reduces the involvement of external stakeholders in the governing body and consolidates democratic elections as the primary mechanism for appointing individual academic authorities and nominating representatives for collegiate bodies. Ultimately, the 2018 reform reflects the consensus reached between the government and Congress regarding a thematic agenda aimed at strengthening the State's role as a coordinating force in HE and maintaining control of State universities in the hands of academics under a predominant collegiate governance scheme.

On the other hand, through its Principal role, the State has deployed a priority agenda through diverse instruments functioning as contracts with HEIs. In this way, the program of strengthening State universities has been aimed at promoting the development and improvement of institutional management, the digitization and virtualization of universities, the enhancement of academic quality for training and research, as well as the support for territorial development with a particular emphasis on applied research, innovation, and technological transfer (MINEDUC, 2022). At the same time, there is a special agreement with state universities aimed at promoting community engagement actions associated with culture, heritage, and the arts, community intervention, science centers, and music conservatories, among others. Moreover, through direct agreements, public policy has focused on ensuring access to HE for outstanding students from vulnerable backgrounds through guaranteed slots.

Additionally, through competitive funds, priority areas have been defined for the university and technical-professional subsystems. In both cases, these areas are related to supporting student progress and community engagement with a focus on regional and local territories and curricular innovation to promote alignment with local needs and resources, relevance, and quality of educational offerings, potentially incorporating the use of technology, gender equality and non-discrimination, interculturality, and initial elementary and secondary school teacher training (MINEDUC, 2022). In essence, the State's priorities are centered on improving and expanding HE, ensuring its accessibility and relevance, and strengthening the connection between HEIs and their local communities. These priorities have generated discussions about how HEIs can contribute to expanding the productive matrix and the country's competitiveness through innovation, technological transfer, and advanced human capital training.

As previously mentioned, recent changes have strengthened the State's regulatory role, expanding the areas that can be regulated in comparison with the regulatory framework in place before 2018. In this sense, the most notable of these new regulations address issues of standardizing the mission functions of HEIs, access to the HE system, control processes, enrollment growth, tuition fee setting, and public funding usage (MINEDUC, 2018). Indeed, for the first time, the definition of institutional missions for universities, professional institutes, and technical training centers has been incorporated into law. In the case of universities, all are expected to engage in research activities, establishing an ideal university model towards which the entire system should converge.

An access system to HEIs managed by the Higher Education Undersecretariat has also been established, providing information about HEIs, academic offerings and vacancies, admission processes, selection mechanisms and factors, and their deadlines, provided by the HEIs themselves. Subsequently, new oversight and control processes led by the sector's Superintendency include interpreting regulations and their application, conducting audits, investigating and resolving complaints, formulating charges, and applying sanctions. For State HEIs, these new oversight processes and supervisory instruments complement mechanisms used by the Comptroller General of the Republic, resulting in dual control over similar matters.

Enrollment regulation has also been incorporated by setting vacancies considering HEIs' accreditation results, type of HEIs, regional HE coverage, and definitions established in the national HE development strategy managed by the sector's Undersecretariat. Additionally, the law states that tuition fee prices are regulated considering similar program cost structures, their curriculum, program type, HEIs' accreditation results, their size according to the total student enrollment, and the region where programs are offered. Likewise, the law stipulates that public funds provided to HEIs through free education can only be used for teaching-related purposes. In essence, the 2018 reform has led to a more complex public agenda by transferring a set of issues previously addressed through interaction between HEIs and the market to the State sphere.

In terms of the evaluative function, there has also been a significant increase in the State's prominence. This greater relevance is due, in part, to the expansion of the variety of areas and issues involved in evaluative processes. The changes introduced in the 2018 HE law established a broader framework for the State in evaluating HEI quality. Firstly, institutional accreditation becomes mandatory for all HEIs, encompassing the entirety of campuses, functions, and levels of educational programs of HEIs, including undergraduate and postgraduate courses in various modalities (in-person, blended, or distance), selected by the National Accreditation Commission (CNA) for this purpose. Moreover, evaluation dimensions are expanded by incorporating internal quality assurance. Then, mandatory accreditation is established for medical, dental, and pedagogy careers, and doctoral programs. Additionally, quality criteria and standards are established for the institutional accreditation process, accreditation of courses and programs, and accreditation of master's, doctoral, and medical and dental specialties programs.

For the university subsystem, 14 criteria and 42 standards currently define achievement levels established to assess university quality across different dimensions (teaching and training outcomes, strategic management and institutional resources, internal quality assurance, community engagement, and research, creation, and/or innovation). Indeed, this framework of evaluative arrangements demonstrates a dirigiste approach and exhaustive bureaucratic control that might restrict the diversity of HEIs' missions and trajectories. Simultaneously, its implementation has sparked debate within academic communities about whether these arrangements constitute excessive control and whether meeting requirements is viable in the medium term, considering, on the other hand, increasing restrictions on access to financing and the use of public resources. From a theoretical perspective, it is recognised that higher education requires active state intervention to ensure that the education provided meets basic quality standards. At the same time, it is imperative that the state guarantees the excellence of education, thus enabling it to play a decisive role in society (Valdés, 2023). In the case of Chile, the strengthening of the state's evaluative role has been effective in raising the quality of those higher

education institutions with the greatest deficiencies. In this context, the implementation of an external quality assurance system has strengthened the confidence and legitimacy of the higher education system. However, changes in the external quality assurance system introduced by the 2018 education reform have privileged the development of a culture of regulatory compliance over the promotion of capacities for autonomous self-regulation by higher education institutions. This has led to questions about the impact of such changes on institutional autonomy (Bernasconi, 2014), without so far concrete evidence of their direct influence on the substantial improvement of educational quality (Enders and Westerheijden, 2017). The following quote reflects one interviewee's perception of the external quality assurance system and its effect on academic autonomy:

“The CNA (National Accreditation Commission) sets the guidelines in one way or another, so although we are autonomous in the classroom, we also have to pay attention to certain guidelines that they impose on us. I think that today the CNA has shown the way, what we can decide as an academic body is one thing, but we have to follow what the CNA provides”.

Finally, the State's financing role has also strengthened in recent years, intensifying the debate about which topics or issues should be prioritized for public funding. In this context, at least three tensions are recognized. The first relates to the balance between public and private financing of HE. The question arises whether public expenditure can keep pace with the growth of HE costs, considering increased quality demands and decreased private spending from families and students. The second tension is associated with the difference between funding allocated for accessing HE and funding allocated for research, science, and technology. This point is relevant as Chile is one of the OECD countries that invests the least in research and development (OECD, 2022). In 2022, resources allocated to HEIs from the Ministry of Science, Technology, Knowledge, and Innovation represented 6.3% of the total funding aimed at covering expenses related to free education, loans, scholarships, and other student support instruments (CGR, 2022). The third tension is linked to the mechanism for financing access to HE. The discussion revolves around whether students should pay for HE, who should, and when. There is a contrast between the two main student financing mechanisms in Chile today: free education and the loan system. An additional discussion point is that 86% of resources allocated to loans and scholarships were for students enrolled in private HEIs. In turn, 28% of the total resources for free education were awarded to students who attend State HEIs while 72% of the funds went to students who matriculated in private HEIs (CGR, 2022).

6. Conclusions

This article investigates the various roles that the Chilean State/Government plays within the governance framework of the Higher Education (HE) system following the legislative reforms introduced in 2018. The findings of this study contribute to the international academic discourse from two perspectives. Firstly, the analysis of the Chilean case serves as a contribution to the global discussion on the dynamics, trends, and specificities of the governance of national HE systems and the evolving roles of the State. Secondly, it contributes to the development and application of new analytical frameworks that enable the study of the heterogeneity of national HE systems and the increasing complexity of coordination dynamics.

Specifically, the analysis suggests that the legislative changes in 2018 increased the state's influence in coordinating the HE system, which simultaneously became more complex. Within the new regulatory framework, the State has strengthened its roles as a regulator, evaluator, and funder of HE. From the multilevel dimension, the 2018 reform has enhanced the capacities and authority of the central-national bureaucracy over Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the market. Furthermore, the differentiation of the HE system has expanded horizontally through the establishment of a new technical education subsystem under state provision. In this regard, the creation of new state universities and technical training centers represents a mini counter-reform compared to the privatization reforms carried out by the military government during the 1980s.

In the multiactor dimension, the period studied has evidenced an increased prominence of the State as a representative of the public interest. Indeed, there has been a greater diversification of actors acting on behalf of the State. Moreover, following the reform, the HE system has maintained its tradition of mixed provision, both public and private. Indeed, changes in regulation and quality assurance have reinforced the integrated nature of the Chilean HE system from the perspective of the cross-cutting nature of the rules of the game. However, it is important to note that direct funding to state higher education institutions, as stipulated by law, marks a significant change. This change implies a more pronounced differentiation in the relationship between the State and higher education institutions, depending on whether they are public or private, a distinction less evident before the implementation of the reform.

Regarding the multiagenda dimension, it can be inferred that the 2018 reform was an agreement that resolved a set of issues that had been in dispute for the last two decades. These issues revolved around regulating the operation of HEIs, ensuring the quality of their performance and the State's role in student financing.

Finally, the application of this conceptual and methodological approach may prove valuable in studying the complexity of governance in the national higher education systems of other Latin American countries. Simultaneously, this approach creates opportunities for future research on specific areas of governance. For example, this approach would be advantageous to conduct empirical studies to identify actors, interests, and agendas and examine the tensions arising from their interactions regarding such topics as ensuring the quality of HEIs or managing their teaching, research, and innovation functions.

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